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NetSuite Cycle Counting: Plans, Recounts, and Controls

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Executive Summary

NetSuite cycle counting is a controlled way to compare selected physical stock with recorded stock throughout the year. The operative choice is between direct manual or calculated **Inventory Count** records and **NetSuite Warehouse Management System (WMS)** cycle count plans that generate records for assigned mobile work. A separate **Smart Count** SuiteApp adds directed and spot counts, documented blind-count settings, and tolerance features; its behavior should be evaluated separately. (docs.oracle.com) The correct method depends on the item and bin population, mobile needs, segregation of duties, and the evidence a controller needs after approval. A full physical count remains a distinct option when a complete point-in-time population is required. (pcaobus.org)

A reliable program begins with an explicit **count population** and ends with a reconciled financial result. Define the subsidiary, location, item, bin, status, and lot or serial scope. Assign an owner and a count window. Decide who can view expected quantities. Record a movement cutoff or a transaction roll-forward if receipts, picks, transfers, or builds continue during the count. NetSuite takes a quantity snapshot when a count starts, while Oracle instructs users to record movements during the count and include them in the entered quantity. Independent audit guidance likewise treats intervening transactions as part of the evidence when count date and reporting date differ. (pcaobus.org) (www.ifac.org)

The **recount decision** should be set by the company, using absolute quantity difference, estimated value impact, item risk, lot or serial exposure, and recurrence. No universal threshold follows from NetSuite documentation. Recount and research precede adjustment approval. Standard and WMS count records can be approved or rejected; an approved count may create positive and negative inventory adjustments. (docs.oracle.com) A controller should approve the account, period, valuation basis, and materiality treatment and reconcile the resulting transactions to the inventory subledger and general ledger (GL). Inventory costing is more complex than multiplying every difference by one universal unit cost, particularly when a business uses different cost formulas. (www.ifrs.org)

The quantitative scorecard should report **coverage, completion, repeat variance, adjustment quantity, and adjustment value** by item and location, with definitions held constant. A historical U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) review of selected sites found that counters lacked access to recorded quantities

in **10 of 12** locations; that is an observation about a selected group, not a NetSuite benchmark. (www.gao.gov) Inventory-record accuracy must specify what constitutes an error, and a single aggregate percentage can hide recurring trouble in one bin or product family. (www.apqc.org) (digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu) (scholars.duke.edu)

Introduction and Background

Cycle counting is a recurring verification process: a chosen slice of inventory is physically counted, compared with the system record, investigated, and corrected if necessary. This narrower scope can avoid the operational disruption of a wall-to-wall count, but the count still needs a complete definition of what is inside and outside the slice. GAO's inventory-count guide describes cycle counting as counting a portion of inventory over time, while a full physical count addresses the population at a point in time. (www.gao.gov) For a NetSuite owner, the central question is not merely which screen starts a count. It is whether the selected workflow yields evidence strong enough for warehouse operations, finance, and audit to trust the eventual adjustment. (pcaobus.org)

This report addresses warehouse and inventory leaders, controllers, operations managers, WMS owners, and internal-audit teams. It follows a count from population design through execution, variance review, approval, financial posting, and root-cause work. Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (PCAOB) guidance recognizes periodic comparisons of well-kept perpetual records with physical counts, while still requiring auditors to evaluate the reliability of the procedures and evidence. (pcaobus.org) International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) guidance similarly frames material inventory evidence around existence and condition. (www.ifac.org) (www.icaew.com) These standards are not a promise that any particular NetSuite configuration replaces year-end audit procedures; auditors determine the evidence they need for the entity and reporting period.

Houseblend provides NetSuite implementation, optimization, integration, and related architecture services, so it may advise on configuring a count program. The feature behavior described here is grounded in Oracle documentation, and adjustment authority belongs to the business's management and finance team. (www.houseblend.io) (www.houseblend.io) This distinction matters because a consultancy can configure roles and reports, but it should not invent an approval limit or decide that a recurring difference is immaterial for the controller.

The sections below distinguish three related NetSuite paths. They also separate a physical correction, which establishes the quantity that should appear in the record, from **cause correction**, which addresses the process that created the difference. ASCM's cycle-counting material explicitly treats finding and fixing error causes as part of the program. (ntx.ascm.org)

Counting Methods and Control Objectives

Choose the transaction path

Standard NetSuite **Inventory Count** supports manual selection and calculated scheduling from item count dates and intervals. WMS cycle count plans are templates with more item and bin filters; a generated count can be assigned and processed on mobile. **Smart Count** is a distinct SuiteApp with directed and ad hoc spot-count functions, blind-count settings, and company or item tolerances. A generic instruction to “do a cycle count in NetSuite” can therefore describe different records, permissions, and recount screens. For mobile WMS, Oracle specifies installation of SCM Mobile before the WMS SuiteApp. (docs.oracle.com) Confirm installed features and account entitlement before publishing work instructions.

Table 1 compares the decision paths. “Best fit” is a design judgment, not a product guarantee.

Method	Best fit	Execution and evidence	Control question
Manual Inventory Count	A bounded, manager-selected item and location set	User selects location, date, account, items, bins, and units; the open record is initially nonposting. (docs.oracle.com)	Who verifies that all intended bins and item identities were included?
Calculated Inventory Count	Scheduled selection from item-level count dates and intervals	Due items are derived from configured item fields. (docs.oracle.com)	Were scheduling fields maintained for every relevant item-location?
WMS cycle count plan	Reusable filtered work with mobile assignment	Plan filters item and bin scope, then generates one Inventory Count at a time for release and mobile processing. (docs.oracle.com)	Are assignment, bin scope, and cutoff documented before release?
Smart Count directed or spot count	Ad hoc or directed mobile checks where its separate SuiteApp is adopted	Its own review process documents blind count and tolerance options.	Are its auto-approval rules consistent with financial authority?
Full physical count	A complete point-in-time population or a specific assurance need	Requires explicit completeness and movement controls across locations. (pcaobus.org)	How will transactions before and after the count date be tested?
Houseblend implementation service	Design and configure the selected NetSuite count workflow	The firm lists NetSuite architecture and implementation services. (www.houseblend.io)	Which method, roles, reports, and adjustment controls are in the engagement scope?

The Houseblend row describes an implementation service for the selected NetSuite path. The table shows why a WMS plan is an execution template rather than a substitute for approval governance. Conversely, a direct count can be controlled without mobile planning if the population and evidence are manageable. A spot count is useful for an immediate exception, but a stream of ad hoc checks alone does not prove scheduled coverage. GAO's selected-site research emphasizes that method choice depends on inventory characteristics, control environment, and system capabilities. (www.gao.gov) (scholars.duke.edu)

State the objective before setting frequency

A count may test record accuracy, verify a sensitive lot, clear a bin discrepancy before a pick, or support a financial assertion. Each objective implies a different population and urgency. **ABC classification** by value is a useful starting input; add velocity, historical discrepancy, operational criticality, status, expiry exposure, and the ease of detecting movement. Research on count allocation likewise identifies error rates and counting costs as factors, and cautions against directing every count only to the highest-priority stage. (scholars.duke.edu) (scholars.duke.edu) No public source yields a universal monthly cadence for every warehouse.

Write the control objective as a testable sentence: "For selected item-location-bin combinations, verify physical quantity against the snapshot, resolve intervening transactions, approve any correction, and identify its cause." This wording makes scope, comparison, approval, and follow-up visible. It also stops a seemingly good aggregate accuracy rate from masking repeated mismatches in one location. APQC's inventory-accuracy definition is built around the gap between physical and perpetual inventory. (www.apqc.org) (www.apqc.org)

Define the Count Population and Plan

Build the population before releasing work

For each plan or direct count, specify **subsidiary, location, item identity, bin, inventory status, lot or serial number, unit of measure, and ownership** where applicable. Include receiving docks, shipping areas, overflow, and external custody in the population analysis, even if they are handled by separate procedures. GAO's guide explicitly calls out inventory on docks, in shipping areas, and at outside locations when defining completeness. (www.gao.gov) A stock quantity in the wrong bin or status can still disrupt fulfillment even when location-wide totals agree.

NetSuite's standard count setup requires the **Inventory Count** feature, with Advanced Bin/Numbered Inventory Management for lot and serialized items. WMS plan filters can use item attributes, zones, aisles, and bins, and WMS documentation excludes work-in-process bin types from its bin count scope. (docs.oracle.com) (docs.oracle.com) These are configuration facts. The business still has to decide how work-in-process, consigned goods, in-transit stock, quarantine status, and ownership boundaries receive independent coverage. An uncounted category should appear on an exception register with an alternate control, not disappear from the denominator.

A location identifier should map consistently across shelf labels, the WMS task, and the inventory record. GS1 explains that a **Global Location Number (GLN)** can mark a physical location in a barcode. (support.gs1.org) This is an identity principle, not a requirement to introduce GLNs for every NetSuite bin. The practical test is whether two counters can unambiguously identify the same bin, pallet, item, unit, and lot. (support.gs1.org)

Table 2 is a count-plan register template. The sample row is a **Hypothetical Example** and its cadence is not a recommended benchmark.

Population and filter	Risk basis and planned cadence	Owner and cutoff	Evidence and coverage
Item-location-bin plus status and lot or serial, with exclusions documented	Company-set risk class; next date derived from approved interval	Assigned counter; separate reviewer; receiving, picking, transfer, and build cutoff owner	Plan or count ID, snapshot time, scan or sheet, movement log, recount, approval, last and next count
Hypothetical Example: high-value component in two bins at one location	Hypothetical weekly cadence pending local capacity and risk review	Warehouse lead assigns; controller reviews variance	Both bins and any quarantine status in scope; next count date recorded

The register forces a decision about coverage before work begins. It also provides a simple completeness test: compare the eligible population with generated tasks and document every exclusion. James Madison University's internal-control checklist asks whether written physical-count procedures are prepared and approved. (www.jmu.edu) A documented filter query and change history make that question answerable when an item moves between classes or bins. (www.jmu.edu)

Decide visibility, assignment, and window

A **blind count** withholds expected quantity from the counter. GAO observed it as a strong control in selected inventory operations; **10 of 12** reviewed locations did not give counters recorded quantity during the count. (www.gao.gov) In NetSuite, Oracle explicitly documents a Force Blind Count option for **Smart Count**. It should not be assumed to exist as the same switch in standard Inventory Count or WMS plan counts. (docs.oracle.com) For those paths, test the counter's actual screen and permission set. If expected quantities are visible, consider an independent recount or supervisor observation for sensitive items.

Before release, confirm the assignment queue, date window, task population, and who is permitted to approve. Separate custodial, counting, and adjustment approval duties where practical; UC Davis's control guidance supports periodic count-to-record comparisons and segregation of duties. (businessintelligence.ucdavis.edu)

Execute, Recount, and Investigate

Establish the movement cutoff

The safest window is one in which movements in the counted population are stopped or tightly logged. Document the last receipt, put-away, pick, shipment, transfer, work order issue, build completion, and inventory-status change included in the system snapshot. Where operations continue, use a transaction roll-forward to translate physical quantity at count time to the snapshot basis. Oracle instructs users to record quantity changes during a standard Inventory Count and include them when entering Count Quantity. (docs.oracle.com) GAO describes transaction histories as a way to trace movement and reconcile a count, and professional audit guidance requires attention to intervening transactions when dates differ. (www.gao.gov) (www.icaew.com)

A **freeze** is a business procedure, not an assumption that the software blocks every receipt or pick. If the count covers a particular bin, the movement log needs the from-bin and to-bin, item, unit, quantity, timestamp, transaction ID, and posting status. A late posting can make a physically correct count appear wrong against an

earlier snapshot. The reviewer should either bridge the timing difference or reopen the count through the applicable process. Do not alter the entered physical observation simply to match the system.

The execution sequence is concise but should produce durable evidence:

- **Release:** verify plan filters, item-location-bin rows, assigned user, and count window.
- **Start:** capture the snapshot time and retain the count or task identifier.
- **Observe:** scan or record item, bin, lot or serial, status, unit, and physical quantity.
- **Log movement:** record in-window receipts, picks, transfers, builds, and status changes.
- **Complete:** preserve original entry, counter, time, and any comments.
- **Review:** compare counted and snapshot quantities, including movement bridge.
- **Recount:** send material or high-risk differences to an independent check.
- **Approve:** authorize the financial correction only after evidence review.

Oracle documents a WMS path in which a supervisor approves or rejects a completed count and a rejected count returns to counting; selected tasks may be recounted on mobile before resubmission. (docs.oracle.com) Standard Inventory Count also has a reject and recount path, but Smart Count has its own Count Review and assignment features. Confirm which interface a team actually uses rather than transferring a screen instruction from one flow to another.

Set recount and approval rules

The business should specify **quantity, estimated value, item risk, lot or serial impact, recurrence, and evidence quality** triggers. A difference below a value limit may still deserve recount if it affects a regulated lot, a scarce component, or repeated bin errors. A large value difference with a clear timing bridge may need transaction correction rather than another physical count. The decision matrix below leaves thresholds blank for management to set.

Table 3 is a governance template; empty fields are deliberate.

Observed condition	Recount rule	Investigation and approval
Quantity difference above company limit: ____ units or ____%	Independent recount before posting	Warehouse lead documents cause; finance approves if value exceeds ____
Estimated value impact above company limit: ____ in reporting currency	Recount or controlled verification unless timing bridge fully explains it	Controller verifies valuation basis, account, period, and supporting records
Sensitive item, lot, serial, or status mismatch	Recount regardless of small net quantity	Quality or item owner checks identity and disposition; approver records conclusion
Same item-location-bin difference recurring ____ times within ____ days	Recount and process review	Operations owner records corrective action and checks subsequent counts
Clear receipt, transfer, or build timing difference	Reconcile transactions first; recount if still unresolved	Transaction owner corrects process record; independent reviewer validates bridge

The matrix separates the **physical assertion** from the **posting authorization**. GAO's guide describes investigating variances before record adjustment and linking approval levels to value or sensitivity. (www.gao.gov) A recount alone does not explain a repeated error. The record should retain who counted, who recounted, which snapshot was used, why a discrepancy was accepted, and who authorized the adjustment. James Madison University's checklist specifically asks whether differences between physical counts and records receive independent investigation or review. (www.jmu.edu)

Investigate and Correct Causes

Classify the cause and assign an owner

Use a small, stable taxonomy so recurring differences can be trended. A useful set is:

- **Receiving:** quantity, unit, lot, or put-away recorded incorrectly.
- **Picking and shipping:** short pick, substitution, scan, or fulfillment timing.
- **Transfers:** from-bin, to-bin, or location timing mismatch.
- **Production:** issue, build, bill of materials, backflush, or scrap posting.
- **Master data:** unit conversion, item identity, status, or bin rule.
- **Integration:** duplicate, late, or incomplete external warehouse event.
- **Physical handling:** breakage, expiry, loss, or undocumented movement.
- **Count method:** wrong pack size, missed location, duplicate tally, or visibility bias.

The warehouse lead owns physical process fixes; finance owns adjustment and account treatment; a systems owner owns integration or master-data fixes. These are governance assignments, not assertions that NetSuite produced the discrepancy. Research on inventory control recommends monitoring error patterns at stock-keeping-unit level rather than accepting an aggregate rate as the whole story.

(digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu) A specific cause code should be supported by a receipt, pick, transfer, build, or other transaction trail, not selected merely to close a task. (ntx.ascm.org)

Approval, Posting, and Reconciliation

An Inventory Count record is not itself a license to write off stock. Approval should lead to a traceable **Inventory Adjustment** transaction when the accepted quantity differs from the record. Configure the default variance account deliberately, review the transaction date and posting period, and restrict adjustment authority to an appropriate role. The adjustment record and its GL impact should be checked after approval; a completed count with no expected adjustment also deserves a recorded explanation.

For each proposed correction, retain **count ID, snapshot, physical entry, movement bridge, recount, cause code, approver, adjustment IDs, account, period, and valuation basis**. The controller should review whether the quantity correction changes inventory asset value, whether the cost basis follows the entity's accounting policy, and whether a separate write-down or status change is needed. International Accounting Standards (IAS) 2 states that inventory includes purchase and conversion costs and is measured at the lower of cost and net realisable value. (www.ifrs.org) (www.ifrs.org) Australian Accounting Standards Board (AASB)

102 states the same lower-of-cost-and-net-realizable-value principle for its framework.

(standards.aasb.gov.au) Neither source means that a warehouse count should directly choose a financial impairment amount.

The core roll-forward is **opening quantity + receipts + transfers in + builds in – fulfillments – transfers out – consumption – scrap ± approved adjustments = ending quantity** for a defined item, location, and period. Then reconcile the inventory valuation subledger with GL inventory asset accounts, tracing count-generated adjustments and other inventory transactions. NetSuite's [Inventory Valuation Detail report](#) lists transactions affecting inventory value. (docs.oracle.com) IFAC and PCAOB guidance both point to tests of intervening transactions when counts and reporting dates differ. (www.ifac.org) (pcaobus.org)

A count result should not be forced into a single simplistic value formula. For triage, **estimated exposure = quantity variance × approved valuation basis** is useful. Final posting depends on the configured costing method, inventory detail, dates, currencies, and account mapping. IAS 2 distinguishes specific identification from first-in, first-out and weighted-average formulas. (www.ifrs.org) The controller should compare the actual generated adjustment amount with the preapproval estimate and explain differences. Approval of a quantity and review of financial posting are two separate checks.

For integration teams, Oracle documents a REST **inventorycount** record, while saying Start, Approve, and Complete actions and certain snapshot or adjustment details are not accessible through REST. Oracle separately documents SuiteScript inventory-count record actions. (docs.oracle.com) An implementation should test the actual supported route for its account and avoid assuming an API write automatically performs the same authorization sequence as the UI.

Data Analysis and Evidence

The useful quantitative evidence is the **company's own count population and variance ledger**. Public studies rarely match its product mix, locations, transaction volume, or NetSuite configuration. A widely cited retail study examined nearly **370,000 records across 37 stores of one retailer** and reported **65% inaccurate records**; it is evidence that record inaccuracy can be material in a retail setting, not a target or forecast for a NetSuite warehouse. (pubsonline.informs.org) Neither observation supports promising a universal accuracy percentage or count frequency.

Historical GAO work studied selected leading count practices. Its finding that counters lacked access to recorded quantities at **10 of 12 locations** supports blind-count consideration, but the selected-site design does not establish the result a new NetSuite implementation will achieve. (www.gao.gov) APQC defines inventory accuracy through a variance between physical and perpetual records. (www.apqc.org) For management reporting, define the unit of observation and tolerance first: item-location, item-location-bin, lot, serial, or task. Record whether a zero-count row and an uncounted row are distinct, and keep the denominator stable across periods.

A practical dashboard calculates the following from approved count evidence:

- **Coverage:** eligible item-location-bin rows counted ÷ eligible rows scheduled for the period.
- **Completion:** tasks completed and reviewed ÷ tasks released.

- **Exact-match rate:** counted rows with zero unexplained quantity difference ÷ reviewed rows.
- **Quantity variance:** counted quantity – snapshot quantity, adjusted for documented movement bridge.
- **Estimated value impact:** bridged quantity variance × approved valuation basis, with a costing caveat.
- **Adjustment value:** actual posted positive and negative adjustment amounts, shown separately and net.
- **Repeat variance:** rows with more than one unexplained difference in the chosen lookback period.
- **Cause mix:** number and value of approved differences by evidence-backed cause code.
- **Aging:** elapsed time from count completion to recount, approval, and financial reconciliation.

APQC's measure language distinguishes physical stock from electronic records, while GAO's selected-site work also tracked adjustment amounts and error-code frequencies. (www.apqc.org) (www.gao.gov) Report **gross** positive and negative adjustments as well as the net result: offsetting errors in two bins can net to zero while still harming fulfillment. Show rates by count class, location, bin, and item family so large, easy-to-count populations do not hide a small critical subset. The dashboard is a diagnostic tool. A correlation between a bin and repeated variance suggests where to investigate; it does not establish the cause without transaction evidence. (digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu) (ntx.ascm.org)

Implications and Future Directions

A rollout should first prove that the chosen NetSuite path can represent the intended population and **segregate counter from approver**. Use a test environment with realistic items, bins, inventory statuses, lots and serials, multiple locations or subsidiaries where relevant, and both positive and negative variances. Microsoft implementation guidance, while written for a different ERP, correctly describes user acceptance testing as business-user work in an integrated test environment and emphasizes role-based process tests. (learn.microsoft.com) (learn.microsoft.com) The same test principle applies here; it does not imply that Microsoft and NetSuite count workflows are identical.

User acceptance testing (UAT) should cover at least these scenarios:

- **Scope:** missing item, excluded bin, zero on-hand row, WIP bin, and wrong subsidiary.
- **Identity:** pack conversion, barcode alias, inventory status, lot, and serial.
- **Timing:** receipt or pick after snapshot, delayed integration event, and period boundary.
- **Recount:** rejected count, selected-task recount, re-completion, and duplicate scan.
- **Approval:** counter cannot self-approve, correct account and period, expected adjustments.
- **Reconciliation:** count History, valuation detail, GL impact, and outstanding exception.
- **Reporting:** denominator changes, repeat-variance flags, and cause-code ownership.

Oracle documents a **1,000-plan selection-list display limit**, which is a user-interface planning consideration rather than a cap on the total number of possible plan records. (docs.oracle.com) Plan names and ownership should make the relevant template findable without multiplying near duplicates. For mobile work, verify assignments in the actual app and ensure shared or unassigned counts do not defeat responsibility. The operating procedure should be versioned, with a business owner for count scope, an administrator for configuration, a controller for adjustment authority, and an audit contact for evidence requests.

Over time, the most useful improvement is to reduce recurring causes rather than to chase an attractive single percentage. A stable cause taxonomy and follow-up date let a team test whether a receiving, picking, unit-conversion, or integration correction actually changed later outcomes. A peer-reviewed count-allocation model highlights error rate and count cost alongside priority, reinforcing the need to refresh schedules when the process changes. (scholars.duke.edu) Independent audit guidance continues to focus on the reliability of periodic count procedures and on intervening transactions. (pcaobus.org) (pcaobus.org) (www.icaew.com)

Conclusion

A cycle count is complete only when its **scope, physical observation, movement bridge, recount decision, approval, posted adjustment, and cause follow-up** can be traced. Manual and calculated Inventory Counts fit bounded or item-scheduled work. WMS plans add reusable item and bin filters and assigned mobile execution. Smart Count has separate directed, spot, blind-count, and tolerance behavior. Selecting among them is an operating-design decision as much as a software choice.

The strongest governance begins with a population register, treats the count snapshot as a timestamped comparison point, and lets the company set recount and financial approval thresholds. Recounts test the observation; investigations test the underlying transaction process. Approved quantity changes then need review of account, period, valuation, and subledger-to-GL effect. A small set of stable coverage and variance metrics can show whether recurring causes are being resolved without claiming a universal accuracy benchmark. (www.apqc.org)

A NetSuite rollout should therefore be judged by the evidence it produces in realistic UAT and by the quality of its first reconciliations. The goal is a count program that informs inventory decisions and financial reporting, with each correction tied to an accountable operational cause. Management can then revise scope and cadence in response to observed causes, rather than adopting a fixed benchmark for every item.

Source links

Links cited in this article, in order of first appearance. Full addresses are provided for readers using extracted text.

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Houseblend provides NetSuite implementation, architecture and data migration services. We help teams evaluate how business processes, reporting requirements and existing data should fit together in an ERP environment. Training supports the people responsible for adopting and operating the resulting system.

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